

DENTAL PRACTICE,

IN RELATION TO

MEDICAL SCIENCE.

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TO

THOMAS BELL, ESQ.,

*F.R.C.S.E., Vice-President of the Royal Society, President of the Linnæan Society,
Fellow of the Royal Medico-Chirurgical Society, etc. etc.*

DEAR SIR,

As you have most kindly approved of the object attempted to be advocated in the following pages, I have ventured to offer them to the public under the sanction of your name, than which none is more honored and revered by every member of the medical profession.

I have the honor to be,

Dear Sir,

Yours very respectfully,

H. HOWARD HAYWARD.

Queen Anne Street,

April 1860.

THE following observations, addressed to the Members of the Medical Profession—more particularly to those connected with our Public Schools—were prepared for the pages of a weekly journal. It is hoped that their independent publication will be deemed neither presumptuous nor valueless, as the object is one of mutual advantage to Medical and Dental Sciences, especially at this period, when the acknowledgment of the absolute connection of Dentistry, as a speciality of Medicine, promises to elevate a large class, whose position has been, in a great degree, one of sufferance.

Dentists are daily asked by members of the medical profession, and by their own patients, for an opinion on the comparative value of the different attempts now being made to establish schools and societies in connection with the Dental profession.

It is at this juncture of circumstances that a Dentist, also a member of the medical profession, offers a few observations which, from their practical character, will, he trusts, commend themselves to the favourable consideration of the managers of medical schools, and to the profession generally. At the same time he is anxious in no degree to imply the slightest blame or want of foresight on the part of the officials attached to our medical schools, who, from time to time, may have had it in their power to adopt the suggestions now urged upon their attention.

A brief glance at the course of action now being pursued, and the schemes contemplated by Dentists, will show that an extended use of the facilities afforded by our medical schools

for advancing the Dental art practically, and for the treatment of diseases, injuries and malformations of the mouth, has not been anticipated by those gentlemen who are so actively and laudably engaged in organising means for the general advancement of their profession; nor could such object conveniently fall within the line of proceeding they have adopted.

Hitherto Dentists have formed an anomalous fraternity—scarcely tolerated as specialists of medicine, but recognized rather as occupying a distinct sphere. Although much of their practice is entirely local, they can only attain success, in many cases, by constitutional treatment, which involves general medical knowledge; yet there has existed no test by which the public has been enabled to judge of the capabilities of the practitioners, in whose hands they have placed such important interests.

This state of things has often been deplored by writers on Dentistry; but probably the art, especially in its mechanical department, has been greatly advanced towards its present state of excellence by the freedom which has hitherto allowed ingenious and inventive minds to embrace an employment which has been often largely benefited by their skill, and to acquire for themselves the just reputation of honorable men and highly successful practitioners. One of the consequences of this freedom of access into the profession of the Dentist has been a limitation of services in a great measure suitable to the antecedents of each practitioner. The individual, tempted to leave some mechanical calling for the rewards supposed to be awaiting the clever constructor of teeth, and the youth, who, not seeking medical knowledge as a fundamental basis, has simply confined his attention to the fabrication of the material and its mechanical adaptation, should ever be regarded as most valuable members of a body, one of whose prominent occupations is to supply substitutes for lost

masticating organs. There has likewise arisen out of this order of things another result, which has been a safeguard to the public, viz.—just in proportion to the absence of medical knowledge, so in that degree have all cases of disease of the buccal cavity, with its contents, found their way into the hands of the surgeon or other medical practitioner. Thus it will be seen that the usual line of action in connection with the treatment of diseased masticating organs, both regarding their supply when lost, and their restoration to usefulness when diseased, has not been so deplorably inefficient as might reasonably have been expected from the unsystematic training of the Dentist.

But the present seems to be a period of no ordinary agitation in regard to qualification tests, and for some years there has existed, among a section of the Dentists, a wish to create a recognized licensing body, through whose agency a more scientific education might be imparted—membership of such body implying a repudiation of empirical practices and conduct.

This state of feeling among Dentists has led to combinations, which, materially assisted by the individual exertions of a few high in their department, have induced the College of Surgeons to acquire the power by legislation, in September, 1859, to institute an examination in Dental Surgery: whether such examination will be confined to members of the College of Surgeons, or thrown open to all willing to subject themselves to this special ordeal, has not, I believe, been announced. If the former course is adopted, the examination should be of such a searching and practical character in all branches of Dentistry, that the public and the profession may feel assured that the candidate has not attained his Dental diploma simply because he is a Member or a Fellow of the College. Should the latter plan be carried out (which is the more liberal mode of treating such

as have already commenced practice as Dentists), it will not prevent the subsequent attainment of the M.R.C.S., nor will it hinder those from seeking the same end who may enter upon the Dental department at any future period. It ought to be remembered that from the advanced state of Dentistry the time has passed in which benefit can be expected to accrue, either to the public or the profession, by the frequent admission of men from other and less comprehensive arts.

There are several societies now in existence whose views and objects do not appear so dissimilar. It may be reasonably inferred that it will ultimately be found advisable that their efforts should be combined to attain results which must be desired by their members in common; but whether they continue to act distinctly, or to unite their efforts, they must be beneficial, by increasing the sources of intelligence and experience, and valuable also as social media.

Great as are the services now rendered by Dentistry, largely as its aids are sought, the probability is that the art, in all points of view, will advance to a degree of excellence proportionate to the great attention paid to that, as a well ordered science, which, though the character of its members has greatly improved within the last few years, is even now a field extensively occupied by impudent pretenders and empirics. But amidst all the recent movements in connexion with Dentistry, it appears to the writer that there is being overlooked an organization now in existence, which, if properly taken advantage of, will very largely benefit the Dental practitioner, and will do for the public an amount of service of which they have hitherto been in a great measure deprived. It is to point out means so available, and the mode of turning them to account, that the latter part of these remarks will be devoted.

The Dentist is generally first introduced to his patients under most unfavorable circumstances; for instance, children

of from eight to twelve years are frequently brought to his notice with the deciduous and permanent incisor teeth, of one or both jaws, so crowded together, as, in addition to their unsightliness, not only to injure the voice and contour of the face, but to be functionally useless in consequence of their irregularity, and to maintain the condition most favorable to caries. The majority of such cases admit of perfect cure, but as the treatment must necessarily extend over a long period, and be aided by mechanical means, and perhaps by the sacrifice of some of the permanent teeth; the parents often neglect to allow time for its perfect accomplishment, for educational or other reasons. In such cases the medical practitioner has much the advantage, because he has had opportunities of seeing the case at an earlier period of the child's life, and might by the timely and judicious recommendation of the removal of the milk teeth, have saved all the present and future miseries of their irregularity. But where rests the blame? Certainly on the system of hospital education; where an acquaintance with Dental Surgery has never hitherto been thought to be, or enforced as, an indispensable part of ordinary reading and practical demonstration.

Again, how often Dentists are called upon to "plug" the superior incisors of young adults, an operation, which, from the lateral position of the caries is occasionally doubtful, often difficult. The majority of these cases would not have occurred, or might, at least, have been postponed till the middle of life, by the passing of a fine file, about the thirtieth of an inch thick, between the opposed sides of the affected teeth in the early stage of the disease.

As another example, how few medical students have ever been informed that every tooth upon the neck of which calcareous deposition (tartar) has occurred, must become loose and fall out by the arrest of the periosteal nutrition, resulting from the prolonged chronic inflammation which

that tartar has set up. Is it creditable to the present system of hospital tuition, that so little is taught to the general student of medicine concerning the evidences of hereditary taints affecting the teeth, as strongly as any of the animal structures, and of the existence of means for the amelioration, or even cure, of many of the varied forms of malformation?

The existence of hereditary struma, and of the imperfect development of the teeth, so often seen in the children of the higher classes, is one among the many painful evidences of that fruitful source of degeneracy—frequent intermarriages. Unfortunately many of the malformations of the jaws, existing both in the parent and offspring, are in reality malpositions of the teeth; how much more extensive might be the usefulness of the medical man, if at the general hospital, the alleviability of several of this numerous class of cases were placed demonstrably before the student. “Underhung jaws,” as they are commonly called, in most cases admit of cure, in early youth, but the Dentist is told, that “the child’s father or mother is ‘underhung;’” therefore it is inferred, nothing can be done. A case of this kind came accidentally under notice at the end of last year. The subject was a well grown youth of nineteen, the son of a surgeon of reputation, who, being similarly afflicted, concluded nothing could be done; but by a simple contrivance the case was cured in a few weeks, the superior incisors being brought over the inferior, and the voice immediately began to assume a more agreeable and clearer enunciation. With regard to such cases, and they might be multiplied tenfold, to whom ought the public to look? to whom are many already indebted? When their sufferings or their vanity have not proved the monitors, rarely to any other agency than the medical men, who can more fitly perform that service? No suspicion of pecuniary interest can attach to their motives; and their general professional knowledge must give a value to their opinions, which would render them decisive.

It is at once evident that, whatever may be the nature of the advantages anticipated from the agitations and discussions in reference to Dentistry, which have lately occurred, about the better education of its members, the establishing of recognized schools, etc., etc., the importance of the aid of the medical practitioner as a coadjutor has not been kept in view.

The question, therefore, now presents itself practically—How can such valuable auxiliary aid be more largely engaged? And under what arrangements can it be rendered still more serviceable to the public, and available to the Dentist, in obtaining an introduction to those who in all likelihood will become his patients, when, perhaps, as in cases of malposition, the maxillæ have become so consolidated, that it is no longer prudent to interfere, by mechanical agency, or whose occupations of life are such that the necessary perseverance would be greater than is practicable. Even should it be one of several carious teeth, caused by irregularity, the postponement of the warning renders it impossible for the Dentist, in many cases, to operate so efficiently as he might have done at an earlier age.

Though much might be justly urged about the amount of dental empiricism, the absence of general medical knowledge among Dentists, and their over-specializing tendency as a result of it; still, it is desired in these remarks to point out that the existing want does not appear to be so much the lack of competent Dentists, as that the advantages to the medical and dental sciences would be mutual, if the education of the medical student were such that he would be rendered more competent to detect those abnormal conditions of the dental apparatus, which can only end in its premature derangement, and ultimate inefficiency to perform its important part in the digestive functions. The majority of students consider the management of the teeth as a distinct

subject, whence it happens that, after the part of the anatomical and physiological course devoted to the buccal cavity and contents has been studied generally, they feel satisfied, and the matter is not brought prominently before their notice again in a practical point of view—at least, as regards the importance of it in the many forms of dyspepsia, which the medical man must meet with in after life.

How can a man “in practice,” so educated, become a monitor till the impairment of the teeth has advanced to such a degree as almost to arrest his patient’s attention, as well as his own.

If any authority is needed to substantiate the above remarks in reference to the intimate connection between inefficient mastication, and Dyspepsia, reference may be made to the fourth edition of Dr. Watson’s Lectures, page 467, where at the conclusion of a paragraph he says, “I am not at all sure that the increased longevity of modern generations is not in some degree attributable to the capacity of chewing their food which the skill of the dentist prolongs to persons far advanced in life.”

These appeals to the regulators of our medical educational system, might be questioned, *primâ facie*, as having a tendency to selfishness on the part of dentists; but should any in the profession urge that as an argument, the common sense which, as a mass, is possessed by them in a pre-eminent degree, will soon prove it to be fallacious. Unless the teeth are in a thorough state of efficiency, sooner or later those obstinate forms of dyspepsia will manifest themselves, whose symptoms and secondary effects, are gastrodynia, rheumatism, gout, cephalalgia, pyrosis, etc., for, though they may not depend entirely upon imperfect mastication, still the perfection of the dental organization will be a valuable adjunct to the physician’s efforts for the cure or alleviation of one of the largest classes of disease to which the

human economy is liable, and the treatment of which is productive of so little satisfaction in the aspect of completeness.

If it has been made evident that great advantages would follow from the medical student receiving a more intimate knowledge of the nature of the diseases incidental to the teeth, and the remedies applicable to their relief, the question arises, How may such results be most effectually and readily attained?

Most of the London Hospitals have a Dentist attached to their staff. His duty is too commonly confined to attending, once or twice a week, for the sole purpose of extracting the teeth of those who apply to him, and removing the evidences of the failures of the junior officials, to whose inexperience "the teeth" are too often entrusted. A few students having the Dental profession in view, may regard such operations with some attention, or others contemplating a country practice may not be quite indifferent to what is passing on these occasions. But why should not his services be engaged in the more agreeable and important duty of instructing the medical pupils generally? They would thus be enabled to form correct diagnoses of the diseases of the Dental organs in the most extended sense; and that not through the means of lectures only, (which, though a most important branch of medical tuition, do not impart sufficient skill in detecting those varied forms in which disease appears,) but by a regular system of demonstration on the patients of the Hospital. At these General Hospitals not only the immediate and secondary *results* of Dental diseases might be pointed out, but, what is even more important, the predisposing and exciting causes. For though such valuable institutions as Special Hospitals are capable of collecting and distributing much of the needed materials, still it is to the General Hospitals we must look for the most comprehensive sphere of instruction for both the medical

student and the specialist. What is there in the latter which is not a development of the former?

It is not presumed that many thus made intelligent on the subject would abandon their original intention, and ultimately devote themselves to the Dental profession, but those who might be so far interested in the study to do so would probably be not the least eminent.

Few as are the organs which fall immediately within the province of the Dentist to keep in health or to repair, it would soon be found that much patient practice is needed to carry out skilfully advice, which the experienced Dentist can readily give; consequently a laborious speciality must ever be the Dentist's art.

It may be said that there exist excellent treatises on "the Teeth," and that to consult them would sufficiently supplement the medical practitioner's knowledge to attain the object in view. Good works have for years been accessible since the days of Hunter, Fox, Bell, &c., but have they been placed prominently before the general student of medicine with the object now advocated? Certainly not. No test of knowledge with regard to the teeth has been required by medical examiners, and it being understood that their treatment would not necessarily come within the province of the members of the Medical profession, they, as a body, have not been prepared to give that advice and warning which, emanating from them, would be most influential, and which can come from no other quarter, if not supplied by them.

It is hoped that these observations in their main purpose may not be considered devoid of practical suggestions, and that ere long the Dental practitioners of our Hospitals may regard the instruction of the Medical students as one of their ordinary duties, and that division of their labours most calculated in the end to reward them by its results.

Since the foregoing remarks were written, the College of Surgeons have decided on, and published the conditions on which they will admit candidates to examinations for the Certificate in Dental Surgery.

However much dentists may regret the length of time which has been consumed in obtaining the Charter, and the carrying out of its powers, still they have much to blame themselves for, in the want of unanimity and candour which has characterized their proceedings throughout the agitation. Notwithstanding all bygones, dentists have now accorded to them the privilege of a more intimate fellowship with a profession, whose professors have been among the pioneers of improvement throughout the world.

The comparison of the relative duration and requirements of education for the Dental certificate, and the membership of the College of Surgeons, will show how thoroughly the majority of our medical examiners appreciate the intimate connection existing between medicine and dentistry, one of the results of which will be, probably, that the Dental student will not be content with the certificate after having gone through so much that is equally applicable to both objects, when a little more labor will place the membership within his reach.

It has been urged against this new system, "that it will tend largely to merge into" the Dental "ranks the failures of physic." On reflection this will, probably, appear but a fallacious argument; there never has been any obstacle to unsuccessful medical men practising as dentists. If failing health, or the close application necessary to efficient medical practice, has been such that some have failed, how much less likely are they to succeed in a department where minute and tedious observation, coupled with a practical knowledge of mechanics, are indispensable to success. A few medical men, or even students, may find the mechanical and more defi-

nite practice of the dentist better suited to their tastes, and more in accordance with their natural predispositions; surely neither the specialism nor the public can be losers by the ingress of such men. Another objection has been based on the ground "that the amicable distinction which has as yet existed between the Medical and Dental professions will be instantly broken up by the assumptions of men who, under the protection of the College Certificate, will undertake a pseudo-medical practice." In reply to that, it ought to be sufficient to remind such objectors that ninety-nine out of every hundred of a Dentist's patients are sent to him by the medical profession. Is it likely, then, that the certificated Dentist would be so short-sighted as to interfere with the practice of those to whom he is indebted for his daily bread.

It may now, perhaps, be hoped the time is not far distant when the Dental profession, in its entirety, will arrive at the conclusion that, if they, as a recognized though subordinate section of medical practitioners, are even to attain to the full benefits of their brotherhood, not only must their preliminary education be one of greater range than as a rule it has hitherto been, but also the Dental student must be trained to regard his department, not as something distinct from medical science, but as so related to it that he cannot fully appreciate the intimacy of their connections until he has had a thorough general medical education, in addition and subsequent to Dental mechanics, and enters "the profession" in a full sense. Then, and probably not till then, will the Dentists attack successfully the mass of impudent quackery which disgraces our civilization.

